

Ambassador D. Brent Hardt
Remarks on the Occasion of American Independence Day
July 4th, 2012
U.S. Ambassador's Residence
Georgetown, Guyana

Acting President His Excellency Samuel Hinds and Mrs. Hinds
Other Honorable Ministers
Leader of the Opposition
Members of Parliament
Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished Guests
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

Happy July 4th!

Saskia and I are truly delighted to welcome you to our home to celebrate the 236th Anniversary of American Independence. We are honored to have Acting President Hinds with us this evening together with so many distinguished Guyanese from government, business, civil society, the arts, the media, education and other walks of life. We have enjoyed getting to know you this past year and forging new partnerships to benefit our countries. We look forward to deepening these personal bonds and strengthening our partnerships in the years ahead.

I would like to take a moment to recognize all of our sponsors who helped make tonight's celebration possible. These American companies with links to Guyana and Guyanese companies who represent American companies reflect the best of public-private partnerships. We appreciate your generosity.

Mrs. Hardt and I would also like to recognize the outstanding work of our entire Embassy team supporting tonight's celebration. My DCM Tom Pierce and Management Officer Hormazd Kanga provided outstanding leadership to our preparations. Juan Cammarano spearheaded our fundraising solicitation. Karen Ramroop and Claire Rotering ensured all our invitations went out on time. Our GSO and facilities teams ensured all our American beer, wine and food arrived, that the grounds were prepared, and everything in place. Norman Ramirez and the RSO team coordinated our security with the Guyana Police Force and we are grateful for the GPF support. But most of all, we would like to thank Jessi Copeland, a officer in only her first

assignment, who has done a simply amazing job in coordinating this entire event. Very well done!

Of course, I would also like to give a special thanks to the members of the “Governor’s Own,” the 13th Army Band from the Florida National Guard that has been entertaining us with classic American jazz music. We are especially pleased that we have been able to arrange a U.S.-Guyana collaboration with the musical talents of Trevor Rogers of the Georgetown Jazz Project on keyboards.

When we arrived in Guyana last September, I was determined to forge a mutually beneficial partnership between our countries to help build a safe and secure, democratic, prosperous, and healthy Guyana that would see the United States as a friend and ally. I was convinced that our countries shared goals that we could best advance by working together, and I have lead our Embassy team to find creative new ways to work in that spirit.

It has been an eventful period, during which we have accomplished much together. We celebrated 50 years of USAID, which continued to

support the growth of trade and investment in non-traditional areas. We worked together to bring new U.S. investors to Guyana and to prepare the way for oil and gas exploration. We continued our successful cooperation to defeat the scourge of HIV and AIDS. We deepened our security and law enforcement cooperation, as Guyana hosted the largest U.S. Special Forces Exercise in the Hemisphere, allowing our militaries to train and work together. We launched a new program under President Obama's Caribbean Basin Security Initiative to support youth at risk with new skills and job opportunities. And, we are working together to overcome domestic violence, develop capacity to combat human trafficking, and protect the environment to restore Guyana's shine.

On this day when we celebrate the birth of our democracy, I am especially pleased that the United States was able to continue its longstanding tradition of support to help ensure a free, fair, and peaceful election that yielded an historic result – one that I believe has given all Guyanese people a renewed sense that they have a seat at the democratic table and that their voice can be heard. And voices are being heard in

the National Assembly, in the newspapers, and on the streets – and that is just the way it should be in a vibrant democracy.

Certainly that is the way it was in the American Colonies before agreement was secured on a Declaration of Independence in 1776, and even more so thereafter when the democratic experiment threatened to come apart at the seams.

The United States’ road to independence and national unity was fraught with dissension, division, debate and uncertainty. It was a messy process – as democracy always is. In fact, our country has always had – and will continue to have – a contentious and conflicted history, marked by political, regional, economic, and religious differences. That is why we are highlighting this evening the theme of the *American Tapestry*.

It was Jesse Jackson, in his historic presidential bid in 1984, who observed: “America is not like a blanket – one piece of unbroken cloth, the same color, the same texture, the same size. America is more like a quilt -- many patches, many pieces, many colors, many sizes, all woven together and held together by a common thread.”

And it is that common thread we celebrate today. For the genius of our country's Founding Fathers was that they realized that this new American Republic they were bringing to life with their signatures on the Declaration, and later in ratifying the Constitution, would always be a work in progress, subject to errors and shortcomings, far from perfect.

That is why our Constitution begins: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union" The ambition was not to form a perfect union – for such a thing could not exist on earth. Rather, the goal was a country that would always be striving to be better, to live up to the ideals and the principles articulated in our Declaration of Independence. That is why our founders built into our Constitution a "healing principle" – a means to improvement by giving the American people the means to alter and amend the Constitution to ensure we are true to our principles and, if not, to take steps to restore that fidelity.

And what are those principles that bind us together as a nation? They are the common set of beliefs first articulated in the Declaration of Independence 236 years ago today: "that all men are created equal, that

they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

The core of our strength is that we Americans are called upon, one generation after another, to pursue this promise. It took nearly a century and a bitter Civil War to overcome the stain of slavery, and nearly another century after that to achieve the genuine civil rights reflective of our belief in equality. Women waited over 150 years to secure their right to vote and more beyond that to attain broader equality. And today, the Gay and Lesbian community is pressing its case for equality and rightly demanding their rights to equality and a life free from discrimination. Archibald MacLeish once observed: “The American journey has not ended. America is never accomplished. America is always still to build.”

So today, 236 years after the courageous signatories to the Declaration of Independence overcame divisions to create our nation, the process of building it continues. It is perhaps useful to reflect on this history in the context of Guyana today. Many people look at current

events, the heated debates in the Assembly and the sharp points and counterpoints in the media, and wonder where it will lead. To me, as a student of history, this “messiness” is the medley of democracy in action. As in the United States two centuries ago, progress will require compassionate leadership, a spirit of compromise, and a sense of a national interest to move forward. Senator Robert F. Kennedy may have captured this best when he wrote: “Democracy is no easy form of government. Few nations have been able to sustain it. For it requires that we take the chances of freedom, that the liberating play of reason be brought to bear on events filled with passion; that dissent be allowed to make its appeal for acceptance; that men chance error in their search for truth.”

I am confident that Guyana, like the United States, will continue to come together as a nation with its own colorful tapestry and find ways to work in the national interest, even as it debates and discusses different approaches and priorities. Our American history, which we celebrate tonight, teaches us both how daunting it may seem, and how the human

spirit finds a way to rise to meet the challenge so that all people can enjoy their inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Please raise your glasses and join me in a toast:

To the health of His Excellency President Donald Ramotar,

To the Government and People of Guyana, and

To an ever closer partnership between the governments and peoples of the United States and Guyana.